

# Hülßen's Historically Augmented *Wissenschaftslehre*

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## Introduction

August Ludwig Hülßen's virtually forgotten "*Prüfung der von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aufgestellten Preisfrage: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolf für Progressen gemacht?*" (1796, J. F. Hammerich, Altona) is the first German idealist system in which reason is conceived of as developing in history according to speculative rule based on the logical resolving of contradictions. Notwithstanding, Hülßen's work is up to this day almost entirely unknown to most scholars in the field. This paper outlines the fundamental aspects of Hülßen's system and targets two of its main innovations: (1) the deduction of the transcendental possibility of rational historicity, and (2) the systematic historization of Fichte's concept of judging activity; the constitutive equivalent of consciousness' logical-temporal substrate.

Hülßen wrote his only book, the so-called *Preisschrift*, under the strong influence of Fichte, whose disciple he was.<sup>1</sup> One of Hülßen's major purposes was to ground systematically the historical intellectual process that led to the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Hülßen's preliminary assumption is that philosophy must have had a *beginning in time*. At a certain stage of his transcendental deduction, Hülßen "injects" an *inherent temporal dimension* to Fichte's *logical-dynamic a priori* concept of rationality. For Fichte the transcendental system of all knowledge is an *ever-existing system*. *What takes place in time is the philosopher's personal self-reflective articulation or derivation*. The rational being creates his own system, Fichte holds, by following the *supra-historical* producing course of action of the Absolute I. Hülßen expanded Fichte's antinomic concept of reason into a historically developing agent. Hülßen's position was that a system of knowledge is *simultaneously produced and articulated in time*. System to Hülßen appears as the final *self-reflectively developed* outcome of a *universal history of reason*, the necessary ending "chapter" of which contains *the entire history of philosophy*.<sup>2</sup>

## I. Hülßen's Moral Incentive

Hülßen begins his inquiry in *Preisschrift* by discussing the human condition. Resistance to moral perfection characterizes the history of humanity. Nature and the rational being are engaged in a persisting *heteronomous* relation of *self-contradiction*. Although humanity has already achieved critical or "scientific" knowledge in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, most philosophers ignore this achievement. Ignorance of critical knowledge is the cause behind the rational being's historical inability to determine his will *autonomously*. The *Wissenschaftslehre* taught that moral improvement demands personal striving after self-conscious determination or *self-identity*. Hülßen argues that ignorance of critical knowledge gives vent to a widespread state of philosophical controversies. The later take place among different disputing parties or sects. Their exclusive object of dispute is the true universal concept of philosophy. None of these rival factions can critically exhaust the derivation or justification of their respective foundational

<sup>1</sup> For an extensive account of Hülßen's life, see Krämer (01), pp. 11-286

<sup>2</sup> Here, I can only point to the fact that Reinhold's early *Elementarphilosophie* inspired Hülßen's program. For Reinhold's systematic connection of system of knowledge and history of philosophy, and its influence on Hülßen, see chapter I and III of my "*Between Reinhold and Fichte: August Ludwig Hülßen's Contribution to the Emergence of German Idealism*", KIT Scientific Publishing (Formerly Universitätsverlag Karlsruhe), Forthcoming 2011.

premises, for Hülsen a key distinctive feature of critical philosophy. Ignorance of critical knowledge results in the simultaneous mistaken assertion of the *particular* standpoints of all these parties as the exclusive *universal* representatives of the only true possible philosophy, and hence, their irreconcilable disputes. Now, this historical state of *discrepancy* or *disunity* worsens humanities' moral situation. For it prevents an *integrative coordination* among contending rivals. The recognition of the universal standpoint of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, of the true possibility of increasing self-determination, not only enables a dramatic improvement of the moral situation of man. If understood, it enables a *universal consensus* as to the undisputable concept of philosophy, the practical result of which will be a *self-determined improvement* of the communal relations of man.<sup>3</sup>

Hülsen's main intention is to teach his reader how to achieve moral perfectibility through self-determined coordinated consensus. For this, he holds, a *deductive reconstruction of the systematic possibility of consciousness* is needed. Philosophy's universality assures an exclusive and therefore *unquestionable* position. The *Wissenschaftslehre* consequently enables a withdrawal from the sphere of partisan disputes, namely the achievement of exhaustive philosophical consensus.<sup>4</sup>

Hülsen shares Fichte's holistic point of departure. Hülsen, like Fichte, is committed to the contention that philosophy must be based on an *absolutely self-positing* principle. Hülsen however holds that from a certain stage on, the system of all knowledge ceases to be a purely *a priori* or *supra-historical* system. It emerges as the *necessary outcome* of a *simultaneous rational-temporal process of practical-theoretical development*, the closing "chapter" of which steps through the history of philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The deductive reconstruction of reason's history, and of its concluding "chapter", is Hülsen's way to justify (1) the necessary historical emergence as well as (2) the consensual overcoming of the morally adverse epoch of partisan disputes.<sup>6</sup> The achievement of moral perfection emerges as the true and inevitable spiritual-historical vocation (*Bestimmung*) of man.<sup>7</sup>

## II. Rational Historicity

In its first stages, Hülsen's deductive reconstruction of consciousness drives heavily on Fichte's presentation of his *Wissenschaftslehre* in *Grundlage*, especially its early sections. Reason, a dynamic *Geist*, is in its original supra-historical moment a purely or absolutely self-positing agent; both its absolute positing and being coincide. Qua pure reason, reason immediately appears to itself as a self-identical agent. The emergence of consciousness (mediation) however demands that this original identity be limited or counter-positing. Hülsen hence holds that in its original *proto-conscious* moment, reason cannot recognize itself as the universal self-determined source of its absolutely self-positing being. Its pure immediacy prevents it from achieving real autonomy. That compels pure reason to develop a system of knowledge. Through it, reason will try to return to itself, achieve a *mediated* self-positing of itself as reason, and attain thereby critical self-determining knowledge of its *originally* and *autonomously* self-positing

<sup>3</sup> See Hülsen (96), pp. V-VII, 3-8, 136-8, and Flitner (13), p. 32. Hülsen historicizes here Fichte's thought in *Ueber die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*. See Fichte (GA), I, 3, pp. 36-8, 40-1

<sup>4</sup> See Hülsen (96), pp. 29-30

<sup>5</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6

<sup>6</sup> See Flitner (13), p. 32

<sup>7</sup> See Hülsen (96), pp. 5, 7

being. Reason's innate self-reflective nature determines the *necessary circular-teleological* character of its entire course of development.<sup>8</sup>

Reason's next step is to oppose a determining Not-I to itself. Methodical considerations reveal that two simultaneous procedures of quantification are necessary to proceed with the construction of the transcendental system of knowledge: (1) counter-positing and (2) synthesis. As Hülsen learned from Fichte, one of the ensuing results of their establishment is the *concrete* emergence of the imaginative ability of intuitional representation. For Hülsen the system of all knowledge cannot be developed *in abstracto*. It is this *actually developed* theoretical ability to quantify or self-limit itself through the practical self-positing of a *spatiotemporal determining object*, which determines *reason's abandonment of its pure supra-historical sphere and its entrance into the empirical realm of historical development*. Reason now emerges as a necessary *logical-historical* developing agent. Pure reason is transformed into *empirical* or *progressing reason* (*empirische* or *fortschreitende Vernunft*). The actual quantifying procedure of self-limitation results in a simultaneous transformation of reason into a *universally self-particularizing* agent. Thus, the transcendental ground of all *individuation* is established. From this stage on, the *general* developing history of reason coincides with the historical epistemic development of the *concrete* individual. Progressing reason's logical-historical ability to produce a system of knowledge should be identified with the finite rational being's concrete teleological ability to strive after self-determination and conversely.<sup>9</sup>

In Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the deduction of the categories, the faculty of imagination, intuition, and the reproductive imagination precede the exhaustive deduction of representation. These transcendental instances appear in Fichte's system as *simultaneous moments* of the act of quantification. In Hülsen's thought, however, apart from completing quantification and determining the ground of intuitional representation, these acts enable a transformation of pure reason (or the Absolute I) into *empirical* or *progressing reason*. Hülsen does not discuss any of the transcendental instances discussed by Fichte. Without disagreeing with Fichte, quantification for Hülsen is that definitive act whereby the Absolute I self-determines for itself the synthetic counter-positing of an *actual* or *real* object as such. For Hülsen quantification should be ascribed the status of an exhaustive imaginative act of intuitional representation. All acts that succeed quantification are simply *logical-temporal* acts accomplished through the self-reflecting faculty of imagination.<sup>10</sup> Hülsen omitted the deduction of these transcendental instances as he simply assumed his reader's familiarity with Fichte's thought.<sup>11</sup>

Hülsen's position, I hold, not only enables new understanding of the concept "transcendental", in which historicity is integrated as a constitutive moment. It furthermore allows reformulation of the key question of critical philosophy, namely how critical knowledge *is* possible. Hülsen's question is rather how this knowledge *has become* possible.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Hülsen (96), pp. 25, 191, 203

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 86-94

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Freyer and Jürgen Stahl comment in passing on Hülsen's identification of history and logic. See Freyer/Stahl (84), pp. 118-9. My supplement to Freyer and Stahl is that Hülsen's insight into quantification and intuitional representation enabled reason's transformation into a historically striving agent.

<sup>11</sup> See Langewand (91), p. 112

<sup>12</sup> See Freyer/Stahl (84), p. 118

Reason first appears in history as a conditioned representing being (*vorstellendes Wesen*). Its empirical standpoint is characterized by a *heteronomous* determination of *concrete objectivity*, by a Not-I that is not yet perceived as a subjectively self-positing object. Progressing reason's next step is to resort to the self-reflecting activity of the imagination and begin the logical-historical construction of a faculty of judgment. This transcendental faculty, judgment, enables the rational being to recognize, discursively, the theoretical efficacy of the Not-I as its own practically self-positing product. Expanding the sphere of its self-determining activity, the rational being frees himself from his first heteronomous historical situation. The activity of the imagination makes possible self-reflecting *in concreto* on an intuited object. Progressing reason accordingly subsumes the concrete stage of intuitional representation under its free self-positing power. It so determines the ground of *the first real possible discursive knowledge*. Progressing reason establishes all subsequent transcendental levels of the faculty of judgment by repeating this concrete self-reflective procedure. The three correlative steps that progressing reason takes are: the (1) positing of concrete objective reality (thetic judgment), (2) counter-positing of concrete objective reality (anti-thetic judgment), and (3) synthesis of concrete objective reality (synthetic judgment). Each one of these concretely taken steps determines a logical-historical epoch in the discursive development of humanity.<sup>13</sup>

According to Hülsen, a series of logical-historical self-reflections enable ascending self-determination of the transcendental possibility of the system of knowledge. To attain the status of transcendental possibility, each practically produced stage of this system must be concretely self-reflecting. Otherwise, the last produced stage remains a theoretically undetermined presupposition. What follows, Hülsen claims, is a *gradual logical-historical process of practical production and subsequent theoretical deduction*, the developing outcome of which is the self-conscious possibility of critical philosophy.

Hülsen's position involves the history of reason as a *normative amendment* of Fichte's standpoint. Hülsen holds that it is not enough to distinguish, as Fichte does, between the concepts of simply *general a priori productivity* embodied in the activity of the Absolute I, and *personal a posteriori articulation* (self-determination) embodied in the philosophizing activity of the finite rational being.<sup>14</sup> From a certain stage all rational activity is *general-personal* or *pure-empirical* activity. According to Hülsen, whenever the transcendental possibility of a cognitive instance is self-determined, a new instance is produced, whose transcendental possibility can, in turn, be deduced in ensuing self-reflecting thought, so revising Fichte's theory of an impersonal or general *momentary production* of the absolute I only subsequently to be uncovered and articulated by the philosophizing activity of individuals. Hülsen's normative insight reconciles two incompatible positions of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Hülsen so reinterprets Fichte's thesis that the transcendental possibility of this system should be given exclusively by its reality.<sup>15</sup>

### III. The Systematic Historization of Fichte's Concept of Judging Activity

The faculty of judgment furnishes the ground of *the first real discursive synthesis*. Thus, the transcendental possibility of *integrative* or *systematic thought* is established. Humanity is now able to start the aforementioned "freeing" ascending systematization (discursive self-subsuming and unification) of the coercive action of the Not-I. The task of systematization, the logical-historical result of which will be

<sup>13</sup> See Hülsen (96), pp. 8-9, 12-19. In Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the ability to judge is preceded by the deduction of the understanding. Hülsen omitted this deduction assuming his reader's familiarity with Fichte's thought.

<sup>14</sup> For Fichte the conceptual agreement between the *atemporal* system of knowledge and its concrete *temporal* presentation demands that the *Wissenschaftslehre* be presupposed, though not as a self-determined object.

<sup>15</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 163-4.

critical or “scientific” knowledge, takes place through the *concrete accumulative repetition* of the judging stages of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. Each new judging stage appears as a *higher self-positing form of systematic thought*. Accordingly, each concrete systematic synthesis results in a higher concrete systematic thesis, the concrete counter-positing of which takes place through an ensuing systematic anti-thesis. Qualitatively, the logically-historically active faculty of judgment cannot develop any further. The establishment of the mechanism of judgment opens a new epoch in the history of progressing reason: *the history of philosophy*. Progressing reason is so transformed into *philosophizing reason* (*philosophierende Vernunft*).<sup>16</sup>

Hülsen’s deductive reconstruction shows that the objective determining action of the Not-I affects philosophizing reason in a number of concrete *quantitative* ways. Personal intentionality, a particular or dissimilar empirical representation of reason’s original being, establishes the possibility for the articulation of different philosophical systems.<sup>17</sup>

All systems of philosophy emerge as *ascending* and hence *not entirely universally determined* judging attempts of philosophizing reason at a definitive attainment of critical knowledge (self-consciousness). *Each represents a partial self-reflecting stage of development within a single, universal, and historically extended attempt of philosophizing reason at a production and portrayal of a system of knowledge*. Methodical reconstruction furthermore shows that an empirically reachable, though not fully self-aware ideal of philosophical perfection orients philosophizing reason’s teleological course of evolution throughout the epoch of pre-critical thought.<sup>18</sup>

All systems of philosophy attain the status of representative stages of the philosophical progress of humanity as a whole. The fact that the same single *universal* agent strives through different concrete thinkers after critical knowledge confers a *collective* character to each possible *particular* effort in a rational history of philosophy. Accordingly, in their *personal* practical strivings, all finite rational beings meet the same historically emerging standpoints in philosophizing reason’s *universal* course of development. The ongoing practical activity of a reduced number of avant-garde philosophers opens up the road for the subsequent general progress of the human species. Progress however demands *personal reproduction* of this avant-garde philosophizing. The necessarily emerging self-conscious standpoint of critical philosophy is reproduced as a personal standpoint. In principle, to strive for oneself is tantamount as to strive for all other rational beings and conversely. So the systematic possibility for a simultaneous development of the intellectual histories of the concrete rational being and humanity is consolidated.<sup>19</sup>

The history of philosophy is divided in epochs. In each one of these epochs, philosophizing reason synthetically counter-poses a determinate number of its ascending systems or products. In Leibniz’s epoch, one finds a *synthetic counter-positing* between the *thetically self-positing* Leibnizian system –the epoch-making system– and the *anti-thetically self-positing* systems of his contemporary opponents. Each thetically self-positing system appears as an *unprecedented practical advancement* of philosophizing reason towards the exhaustive theoretical determination of the system of all knowledge. Thetic systems inaugurate new logical-historical stages in the rational history of philosophy. They establish higher forms

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<sup>16</sup> See Ibid., pp. 19-21, 25

<sup>17</sup> See Ibid., pp. 22-23

<sup>18</sup> See Ibid., pp. 23-24

<sup>19</sup> See Ibid., pp. 72-3, 128-30, 186-7



of synthetic unity, the self-reflected or self-subsumed objects of which are the synthetically given, though not entirely reconciled counter-positions of their preceding epochs. Apart from the universal and non-counter-positable system of critical philosophy, each new thetically posited system is counter-posed by its contemporary opponents; *uncritical* or *non-universally determined representatives* of the only true possible "science" as well. This inherent antinomic situation compels philosophizing reason to strive forward, and attempt to achieve the universal self-reconciling idea of critical philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

The antinomically developed character of all systems of philosophy was until Hülsen an unnoticed phenomenon. Throughout its pre-critical history, philosophizing reason is not a self-conscious agent. It does not grasp itself as the *universal relational* agent behind its logical-historical production. Its *synthetically counter-positing* activity is mistaken for a *non-contextually* established *opposition* or *contradiction* among mutually excluding systematic positions, which appear to the observer only as *atomic and arbitrarily established facts*. That is the reason why what is found throughout this epoch of humanity is a persisting dissociating state of philosophical disputes.<sup>21</sup>

Hülsen expanded Fichte's strategy of systematic grounding and derived benefits for his own historically augmented concerns. According to Hülsen, the logical-historical *qualitative* evolution of the system of all knowledge, and hence of its inherently contained history of philosophy, is *exhausted* with the emergence of the *distinctive* self-conscious insight of critical philosophy. The *regressive* uncovering of the original and absolutely self-grounded I (reason), shows that no additional *progressive* instances of *transcendental* or *qualitative* cognition can be added. This exhausts the theoretical grounding of the system of knowledge by preventing *unconditionally* the possibility of further deduction. The logical-historical development of this qualitative conditions is carried out in each one of its concrete self-subsuming stages through a handling of an ultimately finite quantity (a Not-I). What develop are the logical-historical conditions of the system of knowledge but not their inherently self-posed quantities. This enables the systematic production and portrayal *in concreto* of the *universal conditions of experience*, i.e., transcendental grounding of critical philosophy. What remains is a *quantitative* expansion of these qualitative self-determining conditions for all possible posited objects of experience: a necessary ensuing procedure demanded for the completion of the self-subsuming of the coercive action of the Not-I. Quantitative expansion therefore is humanity's empirical way to attempt to reach the *originally, immediately, and identically* self-posed foundational act of the Absolute I, and thereby achieve exhaustive autonomy. The inexhaustible being of the Absolute I compels an unending *logical-historical striving task of quantitative self-determining approximation*, which emerges as the true historical vocation (*Bestimmung*) of man.<sup>22</sup>

According to Hülsen, the *self-conscious insight* of critical philosophy first enables an uncovering of the universally self-grounded character of philosophizing reason. Through it, the rational being attains concrete theoretical knowledge of how the logically-historically developed system of all knowledge has been established. He accordingly gains insight into the self-pursuing (or teleological) ability of striving whereby reason has attained critical knowledge. All disputing systems first appear as *relative self-posed products*, or rather as *antinomically developed stages* of philosophizing reason's *exclusive* and *universally self-posed* system of philosophy. The epoch of partisan disputes emerges as a historical material condition for the logical production and articulation of the system of all knowledge. The universal

<sup>20</sup> See Ibid., pp. 136-7, 148-9

<sup>21</sup> See Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>22</sup> See Ibid., pp. 26-32, 92-3

integrative insight of critical philosophy results in a *contextual synthesis*, the concrete object of which is philosophizing reason's entire pre-critical production. Reason thus suppresses all possible partisan atomicity, a theoretical result of its multiple and disparate course of practical development, and thereby achieves *reconciling self-unity*.<sup>23</sup>

Hülsen's "scientific" historization of Fichte's concept of judging activity enables *methodical* understanding of the *mediating role* played by each self-positing system in enabling a subsequent holistic step; it allows insight into philosophizing reason's logical-temporal *modus essendi*. Hülsen's augmented *Wissenschaftslehre* reveals that this universal contextualizing activity of reason, an unnoticed logical-historical phenomenon in atomized pre-critical thought, is personal consciousness' *momentary substrate*.

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<sup>23</sup> See Ibid., pp. V-VI, 25-27